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FOR NEA/ELA AND PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2028

TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS EG

SUBJECT: EGYPT: REQUESTING GOE SEIZURE OF M/V MONCHEGORSK

REF: HALE-SCOBAY EMAILS OF 1/20/09

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Ambassador met with Chief of the Foreign Minister's Cabinet Ambassador Wafaa Bassim on January 21 to request the GoE's assistance in preventing the passage through Egyptian waters of the M/V Monchegorsk, a Cypriot-flagged merchant vessel which is carrying ammunition, explosives, and IED-making materiel from Iran to Syria. Bassim appeared not to know about the vessel. She took onboard the information and promised to relay it to the appropriate GoE authorities. She also advised us to raise the issue with Egyptian General Intelligence (EGIS), and with Military Intelligence. The Ambassador stressed the importance of moving quickly, as the vessel is reportedly only 36 hours from Egyptian waters, and is scheduled to arrive at Port Suez to begin its transit of the Suez Canal on January 23rd. Bassim acknowledged the need for a quick response. Separately, the Embassy's Chief of the Office of Military Cooperation has delivered this information to the Ministry of Defense, and ORA chief will raise with EGIS. DAO will also deliver the information to the Egyptian military intelligence branch. End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The Ambassador met with Ambassador Bassim (Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit is out of town) on January 21 to request the GoE seize the M/V Monchegorsk before it reaches its destination of Tartus, Syria. (ECPO Min Couns and MFA cabinet officer Hatem El-Atawy attended as note takers.) The Ambassador explained that the Russian master of the vessel agreed to "compliant" boarding and inspection by the USS San Antonio, operating as part of CTF-51. The USN inspection of the vessel revealed that it is carrying 97 containers, 83 of them labeled "1.3 Rated Explosives," consigned to the International Shipping Agency of Latakia, Syria. The USS San Antonio was able to inspect 55 containers, and found many mis-labeled boxes, some containing IED-making materiel including Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs), detonation cord, and other hazardous materiel.

¶3. (S/NF) The Ambassador stressed that we were seeking Egypt's cooperation in seizing the vessel based on UNSCR 1747, which prohibits Iran from exporting arms and related materiel. Ambassador Bassim asked why the U.S. did not simply seize the vessel itself. The Ambassador explained that the USN did not believe it had legal authority to act in international waters and, as a practical matter, the cargo could not be fully inspected or off-loaded while at sea. The U.S. believed that Egypt could act under UNSCR 1747 since the cargo would pass through its territory.

¶4. (S/NF) El-Atawy asked if the USN vessel which detained the

MV Monchegorsk was attached to CTF-150 or CTF 151, and whether or not it was operating in the Red Sea. We subsequently confirmed and relayed to the MFA that the USS San Antonio, which detained and inspected the MV Monchegorsk, is part of CTF-51, patrolling off the Horn of Africa.
(Comment: The Egyptians are particularly sensitive about naval operations within the Red Sea. End comment.)

15. (S/NF) Bassim offered no substantive response to our request for assistance in preventing it from transiting Egyptian waters, but promised to assure its prompt review by appropriate parties. The Ambassador stressed the need for a quick response to our request, as the MV Monchegorsk would enter Egyptian waters in 36 hours (i.e., at approximately 2200 hrs. on January 22). Bassim also recommended that we relay the request directly to EGIS and to MoD, which the Embassy already had underway.

SCOBET